

Miscellaneous Notes

1. NOTES ON THE YELLOW BELLIED WEASEL, *MUSTELA KATHIAH* HODGSON (MUSTELIDAE) FROM KHASI HILLS, ASSAM

All that is known of the habits of this weasel is that it is tamed and kept by the Nepalese as a ratter and trained to kill small game. In Nepalese it is known as *Kathia nyal* from which its specific name has been derived. In Khasi Hills it is known by the local name *Ksish*. Seven specimens were obtained by the Survey in the Khasi Hills.

The long body and short limbs, are particularly suited to enter holes to prey on borrowing animals. The sharp claws are used for climbing trees. One example reared in a cage was observed to climb on dry branches with agility and ease. Although habitually a creature of jungles haunting the vicinity of streams, they approach human habitations in extremely cold weather rummaging about in the garden for food and venturing occasionally into houses. It preys predominantly on small rodents. The stomach contents of some specimens examined by us revealed a mass of hairs and partly digested flesh, presumably that of rats or mice. No remains of insects or other invertebrates were noticed. A foul smell emanating from the anal glands is characteristic of many of the genera of Mustelidae and *Mustela kathiah* could be smelled and its presence established without sighting it. As in the Grey Musk Shrew, *Suncus murinus* an unpleasant odour persists even after the culprit has left the premises. In captivity this weasel makes low whining noises like a puppy. When irritated it makes a louder *chew-crew—chick-chick* noise. A female collected on 15-xii-1967 had well developed mammae. But the glands did not show any milk secretion, neither was any foetus found inside the uterus. The fact that a mature male was also caught from the same place after three days suggests that they cohabit. The colour of the belly is at its brightest in animals collected in the month of December.

Khasis attribute certain magical properties to the teeth of this weasel. It is alleged that the discomfort and pain arising out of a fish bone stuck in the throat are instantly removed by touching the persons' throat with a weasel's tooth.

It may be of interest to add here that a skin of the Burmese Ferret-Badger, *Melogale personata* Geoffroy, another member of the

family Mustelidae was obtained from a shop in Cherrapunji on 31-iii-1971 where it was exhibited for sale. The animal had been killed about three weeks earlier at Mawblang, near Cherrapunji where it had been trapped in a poultry shed at night while trying to get at the chickens. We have seen similar skins from other localities at Cherrapunji and also at Nongpo, both in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya.

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2. HABITS OF A SMALL INDIAN CIVET [*VIVERRICULA INDICA* (DESMAREST)]

Recently a villager brought a young Small Indian Civet (*Viverricula indica*) to me. The animal was completely tame and we have had it as a pet for more than two months at the time of writing.

A week ago another villager cutting rice in a small field not far from my house found a litter of five baby civets, of the same species, in the middle of the field and brought them to me after the mother had run away. We are now rearing these by hand on Largactil and they appear to be flourishing.

On consulting Prater's BOOK OF INDIAN ANIMALS, I find two statements in it concerning *Viverricula indica* which do not conform to my observations of the six animals mentioned.

Prater states (page 87) that civets are mute, but the larger civet I have constantly makes a tick-tick-tick sound when agitated in any way, either by pleasure, alarm or merely *Joie de vivre*. The five baby civets also make this tick-tick-tick noise and, in addition, utter extremely loud and piercing cat-like miaows occasionally, apparently as an expression of hunger.

Of *Viverricula indica* specifically, Prater says, 'Though it climbs well and can scale a vertical trunk with ease . . .'. I find that my large tame specimen is not a climber at all. Indeed, when placed on my shoulder, on a wall, or on a tree, he appears to be most unsteady and unable to hold on in any way and quite often tumbles awkwardly down. The animal is in perfect health and is quite without any kind